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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ZAGREB 000132

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [NATO](#) [HR](#)

SUBJECT: POSITIVE ATMOSPHERE AT INFORMAL SOUTHEAST EUROPEAN
DEFENSE MINISTERIAL IN ZAGREB

Classified By: Poloff Peter D'Amico for reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: On March 5 and 6 Croatian Defense Minister Branko Vukelic hosted an informal meeting of Southeastern European Defense Ministers that focused on advancing peace and stability through Euro-Atlantic integration. Defense Ministers from Albania, Bosnia, Macedonia, Hungary, Greece, and Turkey attended, as well as Deputy Minister or State Secretary level participants from Montenegro, Slovenia, Italy, Romania, Bulgaria, and Serbia. The U.S. Ambassador to Croatia represented the United States and an Assistant Secretary General attended for NATO. All the participants expressed strong support for continued Euro-Atlantic integration in the region.

¶2. Summary continued. The positive atmosphere at the meeting allowed productive consideration of the region's problems such as the threat posed by the world economic crisis to future integration. The ministerial also generated constructive discussion of bilateral problems facing the region such as the name issue between Greece and Macedonia. The participants also reviewed how countries in the region could improve their contribution to international peace keeping operations. NATO ASYG Sedivy embraced a suggestion from Bosnian Defense Minister Cikotic to try to inventory training facilities in Southeast Europe and better coordinate their use. The Ministers agreed to have another meeting this summer, and Albanian Defense Minister Oketa offered to host it. End Summary.

Euro-Atlantic Integration: A Success for One is a Success for All

¶3. (C) On March 5 and 6, the GOC held an informal meeting of Southeastern European defense ministers in Zagreb that focused on advancing peace and stability through Euro-Atlantic integration. Croatian Defense Minister Branko Vukelic opened the meeting by noting that the widening of Euro-Atlantic institutions contributed to peace and stability in the region. Croatian Deputy Prime Minister Kosor stated in her welcoming remarks that all the countries in the region which want to join these institutions and meet the standards should be able to join. Hungarian Defense Minister Szekeres said that greater cooperation and strengthening of Euro-Atlantic institutions in the region was the best way to deal with the potential problems that could emerge as a result of worsening economic conditions around the world.

¶4. (C) The participants expressed support for Croatia and Albania joining NATO at the upcoming April Summit. Bosnian Defense Minister Selmo Cikotic described Croatia's and Albania's success in achieving NATO membership as a success for the entire region. Slovenian State Secretary Uros Krek emphasized that the GoS looked forward to seeing Croatia and Albania as members of NATO in April. (Note: Despite a heavy

Croatian media presence at the press conference after the ministerial, there were no questions on the border dispute between Croatia and Slovenia that has delayed the ratification of Croatia's NATO accession protocol in Slovenia. End Note.) The Ambassador stated that the USG supported the aspirations of all the countries in the region to join Euro-Atlantic institutions and remained strongly committed to NATO's open door policy. The Ambassador stressed that membership had to be earned by meeting NATO standards and that the Adriatic Charter plays an important role in helping countries learn the patterns of cooperation that they will need as NATO members. All the members of the A-5 stressed the value of the Adriatic Charter.

Name Issue Discussed in Civil Fashion

15. (C) As part of the shared vision among the participants of a united and free Europe, Macedonian Defense Minister Zoran Konjanovski said Macedonia should become a member of NATO as soon as possible. Greek Minister of Defense Vagelis Meimarakis said that even if the name issue could not be resolved at meetings such as this one, these types of gatherings create a better atmosphere and send a positive signal to the public on both sides. He noted that Greek PM Konstandinos Karamanlis had tried to show political leadership by putting forth a proposal to accept the name "Macedonia" with a geographic modifier, an idea that was opposed by eighty percent of the public in Greece.

Bosnia

16. (C) Bosnian Defense Minister Cikotic encouraged the

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international community to support those in Bosnia, such as members of the defense sector, who were trying to move the country forward. By making progress in the defense sector, other actors in BiH could learn to be more responsible. Turkish Defense Minister Mehmet Gonul stressed that the borders of Bosnia must be protected and that the international community needed to increase its efforts in BiH.

Kosovo

17. (C) Albanian Defense Minister Gazmend Oketa noted that the emergence of Kosovo as an independent state contributed to the stability of the region. Serbian State Secretary Dusan Spasojevic said that on Kosovo, Serbia would agree to disagree with those countries that had recognized Kosovo's independence. However, the GoS would pursue its policy on Kosovo only through peaceful diplomatic and legal means. He went on to characterize NATO as a "partner" in Kosovo and said that Serbia was ready to "fully" cooperate with KFOR.

Peace Keeping Operations

18. (C) The participants expressed their general support for peacekeeping operations. Italian Under Secretary of State Giuseppe Cossiga cited the value of regional multinational peacekeeping units in increasing understanding among countries in Southeast Europe. Bosnian Defense Minister Cikotic noted that the region had a number of training facilities, such as the Peace Support Operations Training Center in Sarajevo, that should be inventoried to improve the coordination of their use. In response, NATO Assistant Secretary General Jiri Sedivy said the Defense Policy and Planning Division at NATO stood ready to support the initiative.

Let's Do This Again Sometime Soon

19. (C) The participants agreed at the end of the meeting that such informal discussions were useful and should be continued. Albanian Defense Minister Oketa volunteered to host the next such informal meeting tentatively planned for

sometime this summer.

Comment

¶10. (C) While short on concrete result this informal ministerial offered a useful opportunity to re-focus attention on the importance of integration at a time of "enlargement fatigue" and troubling linkages to bilateral issues. The discussion of even contentious topics such as the Macedonian name issue were constructive and open. If plans go ahead for the next such ministerial, it would likely be a good environment to communicate USG views to countries in the region. It would also continue to provide a useful forum for the participants to build personal ties with members of other delegations that could help ease bilateral disputes and develop a more united approach on the common challenges that lay ahead in Southeastern Europe and beyond.
BRADTKE